

7 THE RELATION

OF

Public Amusements to Public Morality,

ESPECIALLY OF

THE THEATRE

TO THE HIGHEST INTERESTS OF HUMANITY.

An Address,

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BY

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A D D R E S S .

As I am about to ask the attention of a promiscuous audience to a long discourse, I must at the outset guard you from disappointment by stating distinctly the objects and nature of my address. It is the argument of a serious man, whose aim is the public good, with serious people, on the claims of public amusement in general, and the theatre in particular; and this argument is conducted as in the presence of the dramatic profession, and in their behalf. My purpose would be greatly misunderstood, if I were supposed to be reasoning with society in general; or, with men and women of the world. It is the sober and religious portion of the community I address. It is their opinions and prejudices I controvert. I shall venture to speak of the religious community, as a *class*, not intending to claim or admit, that all the piety and scrupulosity of society is in its keeping; not pretending that all members of it share its characteristic opinions and prejudices; but with the assumption that it has characteristic opinions in regard to amusements and the theatre, which need investigation.

Into this argument with the religious class, I propose to weave a criticism of the stage, and such hints to the dramatic profession, as my poor wisdom can suggest.

Having, then, the double object to accomplish, of addressing serious people in the presence of actors, and actors in the presence of serious people, I shall doubtless sometimes say what is pertinent only to one of these classes, without always intimating which it is. I must beg the audience to keep the difficulty of my task in mind, while I throw myself on their discrimination, indulgence, and patience.

I shall be a little dull at the start, but boldly promise to grow more interesting as I proceed.

I begin, then, with asserting that there is nothing *essentially* wrong in the stage, or in the Players' vocation; nothing which should necessarily place the theatre under the ban of the church, or the dramatic profession aside from other honest callings; or which demands their suppression as radically injurious and unchristian.

In saying thus much, I say what thousands of serious and thoughtful Christians, both teachers and disciples, in short what the class I particularly address, will utterly repudiate. The stage with them is the most essentially wrong of all institutions, because it is the most attractive, dazzling, and complete of public amusements; and all public amusements—not to say amusement in general—fall under their sincere and earnest suspicion and Christian jealousy; how much then, the theatre?

It is, then, with the defence of amusement as a principle, that the defence of the stage must begin, if the class I am arguing with is to be reached. If amusement be wrong in principle; if to forget care, duty, death, the future, for any hour of the day, be dangerous—if not to be uninterruptedly engaged in contemplating and advancing the moral and serious interests of life, is

culpable and offensive to Christianity—if fun, frolic, laughter, jest, humor, wit, the excitement of social intercourse and the indulgence of the lighter and gayer tastes of human nature, have no legitimate times and places, and no important and indispensable offices, then, of course, it is useless to talk of defending the most amusing of all amusements. But, I now stand here to maintain and to show that amusement is not only a privilege but a duty, indispensable to health of body and mind, and essential even to the best development of religion itself. For what is it? It is the play of our nature, when temporarily released from toil and anxiety. Its very essence is, absence of painful effort and serious thought, absorption in the present, to the forgetfulness of the past and the future. Nothing amuses which does not make a man forget himself, by calling into controlling activity pleasurable thoughts and emotions. Now life is essentially toiling and anxious. It is made so by outward circumstances and inward constitution. It is our glory that we are made to work and to think anxiously and soberly. The burden which nature puts upon our shoulders in calling us into a world that does not spontaneously produce its fruits, and into a crowded and competitory society, is one that presses into action the energies and faculties of body and soul as nothing else could. But what is this burden, compared with that which God has laid upon us in our rational and moral nature, in our appetite for knowledge, love of power, sense of right, fear of death, hope of heaven? The vast stimulus which our physical and moral wants, our bodily and mental passions, give to our nature, makes life, to most men, toilsome, anxious, serious and sad. And this is what life must be and ought to be. This is what Christianity labors to make it.

For, by clearing up the duties and obligations of humanity, placing new and graver hopes and fears before it, calling man to a higher and more difficult aim, it multiplies the labor, the anxiety, the seriousness and sadness of life. He must think more, feel more deeply, work harder, in view of his new obligation to God and to men. And in this earnest work, and deep emotion, and wider sympathy, he finds the real dignity and glory of his being. He who does not work, think, feel, is a degraded, lost, and miserable soul. The man, the rule and order of whose life is not work, anxiety, seriousness, is a poor creature, on his way to nonentity, or, worse, to moral ruin and future misery.

Now, the true question is, how shall humanity do most work, support most anxiety, have the most genuine seriousness? Experience has taught us that neither body nor mind, can stand an unbroken strain, and we are learning by degrees that the conscience, will, and aspirations require sleep and rest, as much as intellect and muscle. The Creator has accordingly endowed us with various faculties, tastes and sensibilities, which have a spontaneous activity, whose object seems to be chiefly to delight and amuse. Independently of their more serious uses, he has indeed attached a pleasure to the exercise of all our faculties; but some of them seem to have for their manifest end pleasure to ourselves or others. Laughter, the irresistible propensity of youth, is, we know physiologically, eminently conducive to health of the body, which it exercises in a potent and universal manner; and, unquestionably, humor, which is the inner side of laughter, is equally important to health of mind. Our sense of the beautiful, the ridiculous, the witty; our taste for music, flowers, spectacle; our enjoyment of food, society, motion; our love

of sport, of the fields, of games; all these ineradicable tastes evidently have a mission, nay, several offices: first and chiefly, perhaps, to confer a positive and unspeakable sum of pleasure, a substantial benefaction of Providence, which it would be impiety not to recognize and gratefully own; but secondly, to qualify, correct, and improve the operation and product of the more solid and utilitarian functions of humanity; but thirdly, to rest, cheer, and invigorate mind and heart, that we may more abundantly and successfully pursue the toil, and bear the anxieties of life, and achieve its moral and spiritual ends. Thus to work best, man must play a due portion of the time; to bear the heaviest burdens, he must have his heart lightened now and then; to think most profoundly, he must not think too steadily. When the world, on any plea of prudence, or wisdom, or conscience, has overlooked these principles, religion and morality have suffered. In former times, monasteries and nunneries, caves and pillars, held the pure fanatics and ultraists, the idiots and hypocrites, whom violated nature sent there. Now insane asylums and hospitals shelter the victims furnished for their cells, by the headlong sobriety and mad earnestness of business, which knows no pleasure, or, of study, which allows no cessation, or, of conscience and piety, which frown on amusement; while the morbid morality, the thin wisdom, the jaundiced affections, the wretched dyspepsia, the wreck and defeat of body and soul, which a community, deficient in out-door sports, genial society, or legitimate gaiety, exhibits to the thoughtful eye, is hardly less saddening than the hospital or madhouse.

Amusement, then, is not merely defensible. The want of it is a calamity, and an injury to the sober and solid interests of society. None are more truly inter-

ested—did they know their own duty and policy—in seeing the community properly amused, than the organized friends of morality and piety. They ought to know that Nature avenges herself sooner or later—and better sooner than later—for the violation of the laws of physical and moral health ; and that the suppression of the sportive, careless and pleasure-craving propensities or aptitudes of our nature, involves an inevitable derangement and sure decay of the higher organs and faculties. Instead, therefore, of interfering with business, duty, sobriety, piety—with scholarship, economy, virtue, and reverence—amusement, viewed merely as a principle, advances and supports them all. The intellect that plays a part of every day, works more powerfully and to better results, for the rest of the time ; the heart that is gay for an hour, is more serious for the other hours of the day ; the conscience that reposes for a space is more active when it wakes ; the will that rests, is more vigorous than the will that is always strained.

You see, then, that I put amusement among the necessities and not the luxuries of life. Like sugar, which was long thought a mere palate-pleaser, but which now turns out to be an indispensable constituent of the blood, and one of the most nourishing and necessary articles of human food, amusement is a serious, practical interest and concern of society, and not a mere indulgence and weakness, to be excused and apologized for. Society is the better, the safer, the more moral and religious, for amusement. It is as good a friend to the church as it is to the theatre ; to sound morals and unsuperstitious piety, as it is to health and happiness. The very word recreation carries its argument in its etymology. To recreate is to *re*-create, and

pleasure and piety have, in this direction, an identical aim,—to renew and edify our nature. Amusement, it is true, recreates in a very different manner from piety. It does not make the bone and sinew, but supplies the roundness of the muscle, the fat and moisture of the system—and while one gives strength and size, the other gives flexibility, ease and grace. Both are necessary to build up the perfect man.

But here I shall be met with the suggestion, that, allowing all this, amusement, falling in with the tastes, the sloth, the self-indulgent propensities of humanity—being in its very nature easy, careless and gay—tends always to excess—provides amply and extravagantly for its own gratification—is in league with the vanity, vices, and dangerous passions of the human heart, and, instead of countenance and encouragement from the serious class, needs only its rebuke and restraint. Nay, that the very object of religion is to produce a seriousness, self-denial and consecration, which pleasure in every form assails and renders difficult; that it attaches to the world those whom piety is seeking to detach from the world: produces giddiness where religion would give sobriety, and promotes self-forgetfulness and indifference in those whom God's word is seeking to make thoughtful and anxious. Many good and wise people, who have not the least idea of seeing amusement go out of fashion, and who would confess that what they themselves call innocent amusement is necessary and legitimate; who look at the sports of young children—the game at ball, or the skater's flight, the walk in the country, the nutting party, a game at chequers or chess, the music of the piano, the wit and humor of a true story—with sympathy, nevertheless think it their duty to resist the principle of amusement,

lest under any concession of its lawfulness, excess should find shelter.

There is, however, no greater mistake in the world, than to imagine that, taking society together, the love of amusement is an overweening passion of humanity. Doubtless it is the ruin of a class. But selfishness, the root of depravity, and the mother of human evils, finds its chief outlets and manifestations in the serious and anxious passions of men;—in cupidity, the love of power, envy, jealousy, and malice. Out of the grand desire to appropriate wealth, power, place, or to avoid want, submission, and injury, spring the worst characteristics of society. Falsehood, fraud, violence, anger, cunning, slander, meanness, apathy, vice, and crime, originate in selfishness, which is ordinarily unsocial, stern, sober, laborious, and as far as possible from pleasure or diversion. Instead of being self-forgetful, disposed to relaxation, playful or gay, it is sullen, introspective, tightly girded, and in no mood for delight. For certainly we must not confound things different, and call the grim satisfaction with which the miser pursues his gains, the tyrant his victims, the rogue his prize, with which envy surveys the mortification of a competitor, or hatred the misfortune of an enemy, or jealousy the pangs of a rival—amusement.

Nor are the vices of society, drunkenness, lust and gambling, to be placed among the relaxations and amusements of mankind. They are the serious and horrible outbreak of lawless appetites, which do nothing to recreate, but only to destroy. If they are often found in connection with the pleasures of the world, they are just as often found in absolute separation from them. Indeed, the lack of the wholesome excitement of pleasure is commonly seen producing the noxious excitement of

vice; and intemperance, lust, and gambling, have devastated communities, in which public diversions have been scrupulously forbidden. It is a terrible fact, that the first hundred years of Puritanism in New England was marked alike by ascetic public manners, and the prevalence of vices almost unheard of in our free and more indulgent society; and it is even now asserted that the soberest of our sister states contributes more than any other state in the Union, to the sad catalogue of female frailty.

There is hardly a more baleful error in the world than that which has produced the feud between morality and amusement, piety and pleasure. By presenting as the mark for reprobation, the recreations instead of the sins of society; by confounding amusements with vices, the moral feeling of the world has been wastefully diverted from its opposition to absolute wrong and depraving affections, into opposition to things innocent, indifferent, or hurtful only in excess; and thus a very mischievous confusion has been introduced into the natural and the Christian conscience of evil. Consider the thick darkness, the absence of interior light and moral order, which is likely to reign in a soul that has been instructed to put dancing, and the frequentations of shows, spectacles, and balls, into the same disallowance and reprobation in which lying, slander, hatred, and unchastity are kept, and to reckon the love of fun, gaiety, and social excitement as a depraved and satanic affection! What but moral confusion, secret protest, insidious revenges, private vices, latent skepticism, and laxity in directions not open to observation or suspicion, can result to many, from such unwarranted and unnatural classifications? It is true the second generation often pays the penalty of the asceticism of the first,

but the first usually has a ruinous pity on itself, and treats its resolution in dark and deadly ways. We cannot afford to waste our moral feeling, our sensibility to sin, our powers of self-control and of resistance, upon false issues, or on artificial sins. We want all the tenderness, and all the energy of conscience—all the amenableness to duty, all the fear of God, we have or can cultivate, wherewith to encounter real sins, the actual temptations of the devil, the positive wrongs to which human life and character are exposed. Every artificial wrong, every thing pronounced evil which is innocent, every restraint volunteered, every self-denial which is unnecessary, is a positive weakening of our moral forces—ammunition used up in a sham fight, when the real enemy is just at our doors. It is no uncommon thing, therefore, to see asceticism accompanied by cruelty to others, sanctimoniousness associated with sourness of heart, and separateness from the world, or disgust and contempt for its pleasures, offset with spiritual pride, harshness of judgment, and malignity of temper.

It will not answer, then, for the religious class to hold amusements or pleasure responsible for that depravity of manners, and insensibility of conscience and heart, which they so justly deplore. They had much better attack the egotism, pride, covetousness, indolence, appetite, the vehement passions, and desires of men, in directions and at points where the natural conscience and the grace of God will assist and sustain their onset. It is not in the amusements, but in the serious occupations of society; in business, domestic cares and collisions, rivalries and competitions of interest, conflicts and strifes of feeling, in bursts of passion, or secret, unsocial vices, that reverence, obedience, the love of truth, and virtue, and God, are lost. Nor has morality or relig-

ion any business to indulge its own laziness and lack of discrimination, by denouncing in the gross, what has a mixture of good and evil in it; or to affect from policy, a disapprobation of the principle of amusement, when it only at heart condemns certain kinds and degrees of it. Such want of frankness and truth involves the proper censors of manners in suspicion and contempt, and finally puts the recreation of the world, where unhappily much of it now is, in open defiance of piety, or disgust for the church.

I am not here to deny or conceal the exposure to excess, and actual lapse of the young into excess, in the love and pursuit of pleasure. The moment it becomes any thing more than a relaxation from toil—the unbending of a bow kept ordinarily at its strain, the exception and not the rule, the leisure of the busy, the fun of the serious, the play of the worker, the self-forgetfulness of the thoughtful, the recreation of the weary and exhausted—it is in excess. But things are not to be abandoned because their use requires judgment and self-control. The best things are most open to abuse, and amusement, like food, love, power, money, requires to have the dangers of its pursuit pointed out, but not its lawfulness or its innocency, in its place and degree, denied or concealed.

It being established, then, that amusement is not a thing to be afraid of; that it is a good and not an evil, a necessity and not a luxury of civilization; an interest of society, which the religious class, instead of regarding with hostility and jealousy, ought to encourage and direct, I come next to inquire, what place the stage has among the amusements of society, and what titles it has to the countenance of serious people.

I suppose it would not for a moment be denied, that

if the theatre were compatible with Christian sobriety, it would be the most complete and interesting of all amusements. Nothing but scruples of conscience and a fear of countenancing a seductive pleasure, keeps even the most sober portions of the community from an occasional visit to the play-house. I must except, of course, those who by disuse of their sensibility to pleasure, have lost the power of being amused; and those whose original temperament is constitutionally averse to pleasure. But those, few or many, must not mistake their defects for advantages. It is a much greater misfortune not to have the ordinary taste for amusement, than it is not to have the ordinary ear for music. That must be a stupid nature that does not powerfully feel the attractiveness of the stage, when occupied by such persons as Garrick, Talma, and the Kembles; and, purified from what must offend the taste or conscience of good men, the stage filled with moderately good performers, would allure and gratify thousands of sober and discreet people, as nothing else could. The indifferent performances of amateurs are listened to with an intense gratification, which, after deducting all the interest of personal sympathy with the volunteers, demonstrates the inherent charm of the stage. There was never a dialogue spoken in a school exhibition which was not ten times as exciting as any monologue, and every additional person added to the scene increased its fascination in a geometrical ratio. If a few rags of scenery or costume were thrown around the performers, how potently was the charm enhanced? In short, in precise proportion to an approach to the public stage, was the amusement complete. But why linger on so plain a point? The stage is the most winning of amusements, because the combination and

aggregate of all others. The theatre is itself a magnificent place—the audience a great party in becoming attire. If there were nothing behind the curtain—an elegant room, brilliantly lighted, with graceful tiers of galleries, full of well-dressed people in good humor, and seated in knots of acquaintances, talking, bowing, or gazing, admiring and being admired—would be fascinating to the social and æsthetic instincts of human beings. But there is more than this, even outside the curtain. A great orchestra of music, capable, by its own unaided powers, of delighting an audience. Besides a social party, a grand concert—and the curtain not yet risen! But the curtain rises and displays—what? A gifted person, reading an eloquent narrative, or a melodious poem, in a highly cultivated voice? That indeed would be a high pleasure, such as we sometimes eagerly seek elsewhere. No! but a whole company of persons, especially endowed by nature for the occupation, and trained to its practice, engaged in representing some historical or fictitious story, carefully, and by high and rare genius, wrought to a moving plot, in which each scene and act helps on a conclusion—where the passions, weaknesses, virtues, and complicated motives of humanity, seized in their most affecting and interesting aspects, are not described, but actually represented by persons of talent and skill, carefully co-operating to one grand result! The time of the drama may be a thousand years back, the place five thousand miles off; but the costumes and scenery, with learned artistic care, reproduce what history and art have taught them, and we behold what a little exercise of the imagination makes the very action, the persons, country, town and castle the dramatist has summoned us to see! Can we won-

der that an imitation of life itself, in its rarest, most passionate, and heart-moving moments and experiences—where the alchemy of genius and art, fuses into a few hours the whole conduct and course of a splendid human career—a deep domestic calamity, ambition's bloody road to a throne, love's great sacrifice, jealousy's torturing fears, avarice's pinching and grasping way—Hamlet's thought-palsied melancholy, Lear's phrensied paternal grief, Juliet's innocent passion, Macbeth's remorse—that a pleasure so rich, costly, variously and curiously compounded as this, based upon the deepest, most numerous sensibilities of our nature, should prove universally and permanently attractive? The drama condenses what is most intensely interesting or affecting in real life, or what from the constitution of our nature genius knows might be real life, into a compact, rounded, and finished story; omitting what is common-place, irrelevant, or simply painful, and by careful adherence to the great rule of art, which never forgets that its end is pleasure, extracting from crime, or vice, or passion, whatever in their actual occurrence it would shock us to behold, leaves what moves our passions and affections with pleasing though tearful sensibility. The stage takes this drama, and by a living sculpture clothes this wondrous work of literary genius with flesh and blood, substitutes for paper and print, men and women, voices for words, for the dull pictures of the imagination, actual scenery, for descriptions of costume, elaborate dresses, nay, it invokes gifted men and yet more gifted women to take these places, and with boundless study, consideration, expense, builds the temple, collects the properties, and arranges the scene which is to convert the written into the acted drama! and is it possible to conceive that

human ingenuity can ever invent any other amusement which can equal, much less exceed, this deeply-founded, slowly-wrought, and most costly contrivance for the public delight and recreation of human beings? Supposing it to be innocent, I perceive no element wanting to render it theoretically a perfect pleasure. It appeals to the intellect, the imagination, the heart, the senses. It has the charm of poetry and music. It unites the interest of a story with the fascination of a spectacle. It calls by turns on our emotional and on our critical faculties; now inviting us to yield to the illusion, now, to admire the skill which deludes us; it adds to the sympathy we feel for the persons represented, that we feel with those who represent them; that we feel for the genius which made them representable; and Shakspeare, Hamlet, and Garrick, all pull at our heart-strings in one delicious moment of admiration and sympathy. Poetry, invention, story, mimetic talent, elocution, personation, spectacle, beauty, passion, architecture, painting, music, society, light, all combine in the theatre to make it the most brilliant, complete, and untiring of public amusements.

Now I am not pretending, you perceive, that the charm or attractiveness of the stage depends firstly and mainly upon its moral teaching, or its moral influence. Amusement loses its quality when instruction becomes its object, and it would be very delusive to anticipate that people would attend the theatre for educational purposes, or cease to attend it because it were proved uninstructional. The instruction to be got from the drama or the stage, must always be incidental, and perfectly subordinate to the pleasure got from them. I do not doubt that there is potent instruction, and moral influence in Hamlet, Macbeth, the Tempest,

the Gamester, the Hunchback, Uncle Tom's Cabin, the Rent-day ; but if the satisfaction and pleasure of seeing these plays depended upon their moral influence, or if their performance could be justified only by their direct usefulness to morals, I fear I should lose my case with the serious class. Considering the moral necessity of being happy, it is the various, wholesome and immense amount of pleasure and recreation which the theatre gives that first enlists me in its support. It amuses so large a part of our humanity, amuses the senses and the soul. It calls out, to gratify and refresh them, sensibilities and passions, which the ordinary life of the world does not bring into play, and thus rests the other and earnest powers and feelings of our nature. Removing us from the region of the actual to that of the ideal ; from the sphere of the common and natural, into that of the extraordinary and artistic, it changes our world and ourselves, draws upon an entirely new set of powers and sensibilities, while it allows the old set to go to sleep, and thus to repair their waste, while the circle of our development is completing. All amusement does this, and the theatre only more, because it is the most amusing of amusements. It rests and recreates by calling into more pleasing and intense activity, the qualities, affections, emotions, ordinarily dormant in the work-day life of society. There, instead of ministering we are ministered unto ; instead of acting, we are acted for ; instead of planning and scheming, we are watching plans and schemes ; instead of feeling for ourselves, we are feeling for others ; instead of toiling after a distant consummation, we are enjoying a consummation which is perfected in five acts. Our love of beauty, harmony, heroism ; our sympathy with daring, patriotism, passion ; our love of light, form, color,

elegance, splendor ; our admiration for genius, talent, skill ; all these sensibilities, which in actual, plodding life, mercantile, domestic, or professional, get little exercise or indulgence, are in the theatre ministered to, and gratified in a way which recreates our common nature.

The use of the theatre, (supposing it free from moral objection, which I by no means assume,) is that it gives so much pleasure, which is a positive and large addition to the general sum of human happiness ; and that in giving this pleasure, it satisfies an immense need of recreation, and, quite independently of any direct influence on the moral interests of society—builds up, and supports, and cheers the life and soul of man. I dare not make light of pleasure. God has taken too benevolent an interest in producing it, and there is too much pain, and drudgery, and necessary care to be offset by it, to allow me to think it a small thing, that any considerable mass of human beings are pleased. I will not demand of amusement that it shall directly instruct, warn, elevate, or improve. If it give genuine pleasure, and if it do not corrupt, deprave, or injure, I will bless it, and without a single misgiving invoke the benediction of heaven on its head. Do not, then, perversely read backwards all that has been said of the fascination of the theatre, as if it were so much against it, and not so much in its favor. If it shall afterwards appear that the stage has essential immoralities and perils to society and the soul, wrought into its very nature, and inseparable from it, then we will allow that its attractiveness is a misfortune ; its various charms those of a syren that woo to destruction ; and that genius, art, beauty, and splendor, have conspired, in the theatre, to make vice seductive, and folly captivating. But I sub-

mit, that in the theory of the stage, (a very different thing, possibly, from the fact,) we have yet found nothing to condemn—nothing essentially wrong, or otherwise than right. There is nothing wrong in amusement, except in excess; nor in the theatre, the finest of amusements. The dramatic faculty is divinely implanted. It gives life and reality even to portions of the Scriptures. The drama is a species of literature which the world's greatest geniuses have chosen for their own, gaining immortal renown for their labors there. The stage is the drama made more real, and brought within the easier and fuller enjoyment of the best and the poorest judges. So far we are in smooth water.

But the breakers begin to threaten us at the very next step.

It is alleged—and that is the professed sentiment of the serious class—that practically the drama has been a corrupt and corrupting kind of literature, putting into licentious and depraving verse and story, the worst and most seductive experiences of humanity; that it has pandered to vile and vulgar tastes, dramatists having often, or usually, been loose and unprincipled characters, and their readers the more gay and careless portion of society. Doubtless there is truth, and there is also exaggeration in this statement. The great dramatists, whether ancient or modern, Sophocles, Euripides, or Aristophanes, Calderon, Lope de Vega, Corneille, Racine, Shakspeare, are, with the exception of the coarseness which belonged to their respective ages, not open to such charges, although the minor lights unquestionably deserve severe chastisement. But there is nothing peculiar in the abuse of dramatic literature. We do not abandon and discour-

tenance poetry, because Rochester wrote immoral verses, and Moore and Byron, poems which nobody should read. We do not give up Richardson, and Scott, and Dickens, and Thackeray, because Fielding and Smollett, Eugene Sue and Dumas, have often abused their great powers. The best things are most open to abuse; and dramatic literature, you will confess, has not been oftener or worse perverted and depraved than religious literature. Indeed the Church seized on the drama, when she was most busy in manipulating the human mind into superstition, and perpetrated greater blasphemies and obscenities in the so called Mysteries, written and acted in the middle ages, than the dramatic writers of England or France have ever foisted into their most abominable plays. The drama is a kind of literature whose permanency is guaranteed by the constitution of man. Beginning with the very origin of literature, and continuing thus far on its history with every promise of ending only with its life—we must expect it to reflect and share the fortunes of humanity and to find itself, now in the hands of ennobled, and now of desecrated genius; here the instrument of the unscrupulous, there the vehicle of truth, honor, and inspiration. But how many dissolute and depraving dramatists and dramas, would not the judicious and the conscientious consent to bear with, and guard against, sooner than lose Shakspeare alone out of the world? The mischievous jack-o-lanterns, and false lights of land and sea may shine on forever, if we can only extinguish them by blowing out the stars and quenching the sun. We cannot obliterate Washington, to wipe Arnold out of American history, though treachery hung by his skirts alone to the fortunes of the race. We must let the tares grow to the harvest for

the sake of the wheat. The drama stands in its own right, and in the right of its great priests, the wonderful interpreters of humanity, and great recreators of the race; and all the apostates and criminals who have desecrated its pure and beautiful shrine, cannot make its nature otherwise than lawful and honorable, and entitled to the protection of universal reason and justice. It is indeed deplorable, that the written drama should have ever thrown its fascination around vice and crime, as it is always terrible when genius and wit, when art and skill, enter the service of the devil. Most sad it is that pleasure should ever be associated with folly, or amusement extracted from sin. But literature is not responsible for the abuses to which levity and immorality turn any of its powers; and it is not the drama, but the public and the dramatic authors who are to be censured for the production and encouragement of lax, immoral, and corrupting plays. On this point I shall speak more fully and to better advantage at another period of this address.

And now, if, whatever the theory may be, the drama itself has been practically degraded and abused as a species of popular literature, until sober and discreet people, as a class, have thought it wise and necessary to discountenance the reading of plays,—how much more ought the theatre, the acted drama, to be discountenanced and destroyed,—when we consider how its actual, practical character differs from its theoretical one; and how little what is said in defence of the ideal stage applies to the real one? For what has the theatre not been during its modern existence, if the allegations and accusations of the religious class, uttered in a thousand tones, are to be taken without abatement? Has it not been, as much the focus of vice as the centre of pleas-

ure? Have not intemperance and licentiousness found a congenial home within its walls? Have not the extravagant fashion, the unscrupulous wit, the reckless passion of the world, been its chief patrons, and found themselves in their natural und unproved place before or behind the footlights? Have not actors and actresses, as a class, been regarded, by the pulpit, as licensed sinners—utter strangers to sobriety and purity; as persons whose very occupation condemned them to the abandonment of morality and decency;—whose Bible was Shakspeare—whose table of commandments the rules of the green-room—their judgment-seat, the public—their best heaven, the applause of the boxes—their only hell, the condemnation of the pit? Have not the young commenced their career of disobedience in stealing off to the play-house; and have not its exciting and passionate scenes—its glittering audience and bewitching actors—its ready bar-room, and as ready courtezans, softened and betrayed their feeble virtue, and finished in positive vice what began in youthful folly? Have not indecent exposure, obscenity or profanity of wit, inuendo and levity, characterized the stage? Has not the theatre been the haunt of gamblers, jockeys, men of pleasure, women of the world—of all the light and careless portion of the community, and is it not essentially so now? Moreover, have not highly immoral plays—in which successful villainy or roguery has been applauded—the feats of some Jack Sheppard or Paul Clifford romantically held up to the admiration or imitation of youth; the betrayal of female virtue excused; the authority of wise parents made contemptible; the rules of morality held up to ridicule, and the habits of piety satirized and scorned? Have not the serious friends of order, purity, industry and religion,

felt the theatre to be the very essence of worldliness, wickedness, temptation and sin—an institution to be excluded to the latest moment from every well-governed community—to be avoided by all sober and public-spirited citizens, and placed under the special ban of formal religion, as the devil's own domain, the very gate of hell?

Now, I have a profound though a cautious respect for general impressions, and particularly for the instincts of the religious community, and from all I have read, or learned by direct observation or special inquiry, I believe that the ordinary verdict of serious minds, and of the pulpit, respecting the theatre, has many painful elements of truth in it. But I believe equally that it exhibits much extravagance, confusion and illogical reasoning. More particularly, I complain that this verdict leaves entirely out of view the uses of the theatre, considering only its abuses; that it takes no pains to recognize what is good, in its eagerness to point out what is evil—or to discriminate between what is essential and what is accidental in this institution; that it confounds the evils around, with the evils within the theatre, and, to come directly to the point, fails to inquire and explain why, and by whose fault, and in accordance with what law, it is, that the immorality and recklessness of society, its folly and vice, have clustered about the theatre. I do not deny the fact; but I deny the totally condemnatory inferences drawn from the fact. For in truth, the Theatre is the very place where, for no fault inherent in itself, the pre-existing follies and vices of society will necessarily become apparent. We do not expect to find the follies and vices of society, the levity and ease of a community, gathering round schools and colleges, workshops and churches, scenes of labor

and care, any more than we expect to find flies settling upon rhubarb and aloes, and not on molasses and honey. But it would be quite as reasonable to give up sugar because vermin are fond of it, as to give up pleasure, because fools and knaves, the light and the wicked, make it their chief food. Because folly spends his whole time in laughter, sobriety does not propose to disuse the risible muscles; because drunkenness ruins thousands, and gluttony tens of thousands, virtuous society does not expect to give up eating and drinking.

One very large class of the perils of humanity is inevitably and indissolubly associated with its pleasure-loving propensities. It is of the essence of pleasure to lull conscience to sleep, and throw humanity off its attitude of resistance. This is not its weakness, but its strength; its use and charm come of its carelessness and *abandon*. If it did not do this, it would not be the recreation of society. If men were thinking of their duty, or their business, self-discipline, of judgment to come, of serious and solemn concerns in their amusements, they would straightway become no longer amusements, but trying occupations. It is, of course, then, of the very nature of pleasure, to expose and try the character; the powers of resistance are relaxed; the mind and heart are left to the impressions of the time and scene. Just here, then, is the place where the positive, tangible vices of society must appear, or rather, one great class of them—those that affect the senses. But this by no means settles the character of pleasure, any more than it settles the character of the gustatory nerve, that if it did not give us pleasure to eat, there would be no gluttony; to drink, no intemperance! The pleasure of eating and drinking is a universal and positive blessing, and not to be ascribed

solely, with some utilitarian philosophers, to the necessity of supplying men with a motive for labor, but to the Creator's benevolent desire to communicate happiness. If the love of pleasure, dangerous as it is, were taken from humanity, if pleasure itself were destroyed, consequences would ensue, vastly more demoralizing and fatal than any now proceeding from its abuse! And when we are dwelling exclusively upon the evils of pleasure in any of its forms, it would correct some of our extravagance, to stop and meditate a while upon its origin, its uses, and its necessity.

The attractiveness of the theatre, even to vice and folly, is nothing against it, until it can be proved that they are attracted there by what is bad and depraving. It is not enough to show that they carry there what is bad and depraving, or that they are not kept away by what is bad and depraving there, but that they are attracted by what is bad and depraving. I suppose them to be attracted precisely by what would attract me or you, or any innocent or well-intentioned person—by the love of pleasure, spectacle, society, talent, beauty, light, architecture, and I suppose them to be very innocent so far as the enjoyment of these things is concerned. That, knowing their presence, and coarseness or unscrupulousness, the stage should cater to it, is a monstrous evil; that folly and weakness should find those waiting for them there to practice on their propensities; that they should carry their vices and tastes to the theatre with them, is a dreadful and undeniable misfortune to society. But I am yet to see, how, because the wicked and the careless like what the good and the careful also like—namely pleasure—it makes pleasure wrong; and how, because the theatre, in its character of an amusement, attracts the vicious and the depraved,

it proves it to be a vicious and depraved amusement. Have the vicious and depraved no human and universal tastes left? are they not still men and women? are not some of their doings and feelings such as the good and the innocent can share? For my own part, I believe the theatre has, in every age, *exhibited* the vices and follies of society rather than *created* them, and that it has owed its reputation for evil, mainly to the fact, that it has been the only place in which the decency, or virtue, or propriety of society has met the indecency, the vice, and disreputableness. Now, if the theatre had produced this indecency, vice, or disreputableness, or encouraged it, we should utterly condemn it; but I believe, on the contrary, notwithstanding its imperfect administration, it has done something to correct it. Perhaps the most innocent hours of the vicious have been those in which they were publicly amused under the protection of society. For the innocent pleasure, which even vice and folly get out of their existence, is the only part of their career we can look at with any satisfaction;—all else is loss and ruin.

But, whatever the effect of the theatre is, or has been, having nothing essentially wrong in its principle, and having proved itself to be, in fact, what in theory it has already shown itself to be, the most attractive and permanent of amusements, a fixed and indestructible fact, it seems to me, that avowed moralists and Christian leaders and guides have committed a grave and hurtful error in their mode of dealing with it. They have made the drama and the stage answerable for all the vices and follies which have gathered round them—a course as unjust as to make the market responsible for the dogs and rats, the thieves and knaves, sure to find a harvest in that most frequented and necessary place.

I know it will be replied, that patience with evils connected with what is necessary, does not justify patience with evils associated with what is not necessary; that because commerce makes a dangerous life for sailors, we are not to place the dangerous life for actors, which the theatre produces, upon the same plea of a great social necessity; that the vices and follies of trade, of religion, of domestic life, all of which are cardinal and necessary and natural interests of humanity, do not stand at all upon the same ground of absolute discountenance which the vices and follies of an artificial, unproductive, and unnecessary amusement occupy. But there are various forms of necessity, and I am not sure that the necessity of being amused is not as fixed and fatal a necessity as that of being fed and warmed. It is not necessary in the same sense, and yet it may be equally a necessity. We do not commonly place leisure, laughter, love, among the necessities of life, alongside of bread and water, fire and shelter. Yet in a broad view of social interests and human requirements, they would be found to rank with them, not in the same class, but under the same name of actual necessities of a true, healthful, and vigorous social life. That may well be said to be necessary, which, age after age, and in precise proportion to the influence of civilization and even of Christianity, is found supported and sustained in the very face of the church, and under the formal ban of religious society. That the theatre has survived the usage it has received from the pulpit and the moralist, exhibits at least its wonderful vitality; and when we perceive that general censure and discouragement have not the slightest effect either in putting it down, or in improving it, why do we not begin to inquire what might be done

by treating it with candor and sympathy, to save its uses, and correct its abuses; to turn its fascinations to the account of human happiness, and detach it from the artificial associations which are the real objects of our suspicion and dislike.

When I consider that eight theatres are open in this city for six nights of every week; that they are constantly frequented, though in very different degrees, by all classes of the community, except a portion of those technically styled professors of religion; that the tastes, morals, manners, happiness of hundreds of thousands of people are affected by them for good or evil, to a degree which almost renders the theatre a rival of the church, I confess that the vastness of this metropolitan interest is too serious an element in our whole civic character and human prospects, to make me willing to ignore it; or, the hope of crushing it being preposterous, to allow me to sit easy while it remains hostile to morality, or in open competition with religion. I must, for my peace' sake, see what of good it is that gives life to this sturdy tree, which has been so long stricken with the lightnings of the church and still survives in greenness. I must do what I can to direct the efforts of piety and morality against what is vulnerable in the theatre, that their arrows may no longer be wasted upon its adamant portions. I must strive to obtain a truce between the theatre and the church, the dramatic world and the religious world, long enough for candid consideration of their mutual causes of jealousy and suspicion, their seated opposition and alienation; and endeavor, after all our efforts to crush the theatre have failed, to get the public and the dramatic profession to unite with the moral and serious portions of the community or, what is more difficult, the moral and serious portions

with them, to reform the theatre ; to reduce it to its theoretic, innocent, and beneficent office, to make it a legitimate interest and honest charm of society, under the smile of virtue and the protection of religion.

You will not suppose me ignorant of the alarm or misgiving with which such a hope and effort are sure to be received by the class with whom I am arguing. They will say, that instead of reforming the theatre, we shall deform the church ; that religion loses its power over men the moment it shows any sympathy with their self-indulgent tastes, and that an absolute distrust and discountenance of the theatre, a complete and thorough separation from it, as from plague and pollution, is the only way to escape its pernicious influence. This, I am aware, is the almost universal method of dealing with the subject among serious persons, and it is because I distrust the general principle which keeps the world and the church at arms' length, that I am emboldened to oppose it in the strongest and most marked form which this opposition or distinction has ever taken. I speak as a friend and humble disciple of the church ; a full believer in historical, organized Christianity, a sorrowful observer of the decline of worship, of faith and of reverence in our American society. But I think the weakness of the church as an institution, mainly due in our day to its neglect to claim the world as its charge, and to assume its superintendence. I utterly repudiate "the touch not, taste not, handle not," principle, as unsound in theory, and impotent in practice. In proportion as the church has shut itself up in its own peculiar life and sanctity, it has created vices in itself and allowed them in the world—in proportion as the world has excluded, banished, or lost the church from its pleasures and its companionship, it has de-

generated in virtue and encouraged the fanaticism and dogmatism of a religious class.

Religion is the salt of the world; not to be hoarded in hard and polished crystals, as in its original islands, glittering upon the distant view of passing navigators, but rather to be gathered, and ground, and mixed with the daily food of society, giving purity and flavor to all we feed upon. Christianity is the leaven of the world, inedible in the lump and useless in separation, but mixed with the substance of practical life, lending wholesomeness, gusto and nutritiveness to what would otherwise be crude, heavy and hurtful. Who shall teach, who perform this, if not the church? Christ kept the company of publicans and sinners, and was called "a man gluttonous and a wine bibber;" and the church has only cultivated self-righteousness, fanaticism, and false fervor in itself—and a more unbridled vice, levity and crime in the world, when it has understood its duty so little as to draw a visible line between the church and the world—establish different standards of morality, for those inside and those outside its pale; abandoning social life and public amusement, and what is most universally attractive and dangerous, to the unaided charge of the world, and entrenching itself in a monotonous, unlovely and selfish seclusion, of its own.

To this policy must we ascribe its obvious loss of power in the world. Much of the genius, taste, literature, poetry, art of society, are already out, and fast going out of the church; and philosophy, social and natural science, are now, to an alarming extent, in open or secret alienation from it. But, thank God, the world is gaining much that the church is losing; for the precepts and spirit of Christ, separated from ecclesiastical and dogmatic deformities, are under self-prov-

ing and self-recommending forms, creeping into the customs, affections, and policies of the world at large. If the visible church and the clergy would not see themselves left like the pyramids in the desert, monuments of a vast population, and a vast dominion that once surrounded them, but now, out of the line of the commerce, the uses, and the interests of the world, the gigantic tombs of forgotten kings and priests, it becomes them to take their invited place at the head of the real concerns of society, advising partners in the business and the pleasures of the world ; guides, friends, sympathizers and helpers of the race, in all its efforts to instruct, amuse, and save itself. I am a servant not merely of religion, but of the church, and hope to live and die in this service, but if there is to be a great gulf fixed between the church and the world, as between heaven and hell, minister of Christ as I am, I would sooner take my place and part with the world, than with the church ; with common humanity than any elect portion of it ; with confessed sinners, than self-assumed saints—for I believe that Christ, who is the light of the world and not of the church alone, is more permanently a resident with the common heart, and fortunes, and feelings of mankind at large, than of any fraction of humanity, however select, or self-appropriative of his name and patronage.

If, then, the theatre were as bad as the place from which the hapless, erring women came, who play such an effective part in our Saviour's ministry—and it often has that special claim on our mingled pity and help—I should not account it Christian to abandon the stage to itself, or to permit any self-saving scruples to make it an interest of society which Christians are not bound to scrutinize and oversee. I desire to speak with forbearance

of the mistakes and prejudices of the pious—for I know how honest and real many of them are. But I must be faithful to my own light and to the race. Those who, under that strange, but utter blindness as to their own frame of mind, to which truly good men are liable, are willing to separate themselves from the fortunes of their race; to save their own souls without much diminution of their joy that millions of their fellow-creatures are losing theirs; to regard the ordinary and common life of the world as profane, and not under the blessing of God, or the grace of our Lord and Saviour, may consistently join in denunciation of amusements in general, and the theatre in particular. But as, by God's grace, I belong not to this body, and share none of its partial views or exclusive hopes and prospects, I depart, in no degree, from my principles as a minister of Christ, or a teacher of morals and religion, in including the theory and the practice of amusements, in the scheme of my pulpit instructions and my social responsibilities, or in countenancing the principle, and so far as examination may justify it, the institution of the theatre.

Assuming, then, that the theatre is a great and important fact, an institution so vital and popular, that even the serious evils connected with it, cannot crush it; assuming it as already proved that its foundations lie deep in the wants of human nature and municipal society; assuming that the course hitherto pursued by the church and the organized friends of morality in regard to it, has had little good effect, I would now inquire what course duty, policy and piety prescribe in regard to the theatre. To answer this question, we must recall and classify the evils already referred to, which good citizens and Christians deplore, and then

ask ourselves, in view of the considerations already produced, how they arise, and how they may be abated. These evils fall under four heads:

1. The identification of the theatre with frivolity, worldliness, moral indifference, and spiritual apathy, and its general tendency to reproduce them.

2. Its direct or covert association with, and encouragement of, intemperance and licentiousness.

3. The immorality of plays, either in their general spirit and drift, or in their details, with the use of manners, costumes, language, insinuation, intentionally shocking to modesty, and destructive of reverence.

4. The bad effect of theatrical life upon actors and actresses—in a word, the unworthy personal character of the dramatic profession.

These evils, as we have seen, have been immense and are still confessedly great. They have some of them been much greater than they are, and little thanks are due to the Church, or the custodians of public morals, that they have been reduced. The first is, perhaps, nearly as great as ever; the second has decidedly lessened; the third has recently increased; the fourth is hopefully diminished. From what do these evils mainly arise? Who is responsible for them, and who can abate them?

I believe from my very soul—and to what other conclusion has the whole evidence tended? that the Church and the so-called gravity, and moral worth of society, are really, though indirectly and unintentionally, the authors and propagators of the malignant disorders, and perilous influences of the theatre, leaving both the dramatic profession and the public at large comparatively blameless, and answerable only for its more venial sins.

The Catholic Church in mediæval times, in the prosecution of its selfish design to control the human mind, had resuscitated the heathen drama—which in former ages had refined and elevated the morals of Greece and Rome—in the shape of its own odious Mysteries and Moralities. The inherent instincts of human nature, speedily reverted to the ancient standard, and gave birth to secular performances, more genially and truly depicting the hopes and passions of our race. Jealous of such a rival, its competitor both in revenue and popular influence, it forthwith excommunicated actors, and denied them Christian burial. Thus commenced that wicked, selfish, and narrow policy, which, adopted and reinforced by Puritan prejudices, was continued and strengthened by the Protestant Church, and now so largely possesses the serious class, that the theatre, the most popular and inevitable of public amusements, has been mainly abandoned to the unblessed and reckless care of those willing to defy both Church and morality? What is to be expected of a community from which good men are taught to flee; of an institution avowedly made over to the devil and his children? What could the theatre be expected to become—in itself, its influence, its actors—under such a curse, but barren of figs, and prolific only in thorns and briers?

In sober truth, it redounds to the credit of human nature, and to the essential purity of art, to the wholesomeness of public amusements, and the self-elevating character of the theatre, that under this terrible reputation and moral eclipse—desertion by the good, and cherishing by the evil—the drama has maintained a decency, exerted an influence, and produced a class not indictable by the ordinary standards of society, but only by the special class who seek to maintain a dog-

matic standard. The vices of the theatre have uniformly been those of the time—no more, no worse. The theatre has had no serious vices of its own, like trade, with its fraud and perjury; like the church, with hypocrisy and arrogance. The mirror of bad times, it has reflected the vices that passed before it, not those it originated. Drunkenness has carried its victims, and licentiousness its votaries, into its precincts. Profanity and coarseness from the pit and boxes, have required profanity and coarseness from the stage, while vulgarity and ignorance have demanded rant and fustian. What is the theatre, that we should expect it to be wise and moral, and pure, and reverential, to an audience that, by the theory of the class I address, cares little for these qualities, and when it has no character to lose by any pandering it may practice to the degraded tastes of the rabble or the reckless? Were the church itself frequented only by the ignorant and the wicked, how long do you imagine the pastors would be pure and the doctrine sound? No interest, no class, can bear the withdrawal of the virtuous portion of society. The theatre has borne it quite as well as the church would, as the state of religion in Mexico or in France, or even in portions of Protestant Germany might testify.

The levity, excess, association with vice, and general lack of moderation in the theatre; its opposition to, or defiance of religion; its lax morals and bad taste, be they more or less, are due, mainly, in my judgment, to the unhappy separation between the church and the world—the guides and examples in morals and virtue, and the public at large; and to the special emphasis which this separation has had in the case of the theatre. What are we to look for, in general, when the young and the old no longer mingle in the same society;

when the grave and the gay keep themselves systematically apart; and society is divided into those who partake and enjoy amusement, and those who abstain from and decry it? Will it not necessarily occur that one class will ruin itself by excess in pleasures, while the other is seriously injured and narrowed by the lack of them? Is it not clear, in American society, that the gay are too gay; the grave too grave; the young too flighty, the old too sad; that places of public amusement are too exclusively, and to the great injury of their habitual frequenters, attended by a special class, when the intermingling of the class who now utterly shun them, would at once act with a twofold charm—namely, to make general society, home, and intercourse with the sober, less uninteresting and repulsive, and the places of amusement not so exclusively attractive, by being adapted to higher, purer, and less superficial tastes? In addition to its other offices, the theatre is now a sort of blind protest against the sad seriousness of trade and the hard gravity of piety. It says, “there is some fun, frolic, nonsense, beauty, leisure still left in the world.” When domestic life and the religious life shall both learn how to invest themselves with the charms of art, and the mild and pleasing graces of sympathy, we may anticipate some diminution of the excessive taste which the young people of our day have for the theatre. But until the more sober citizens, and our religious people allow themselves some generous participation in the pleasures and amusements of the world, they will neither know what Art is, nor what its powers and fascinations are. Brought up on a hard diet of duty, they have learned to live in a corner of their wide and complex nature, and cannot understand this outbreak of their children into the fields of

romance, passion, and æsthetics. It is an insurrection of nature for her rights, and an insurrection which will ripen into a revolution. It becomes us by timely concession to see that something better than anarchy follows.

I charge, then, the vices and follies of the theatre, as of our other amusements, and of our general society, to the withdrawal, the self-separation, of the moral and religious portion of the community as a class, from the pleasure-loving resorts of the people. I believe that all the specified classes of evils connected with the theatre, would disappear to as great an extent as they ever disappear, even in respectable society, if, after having recognized the essential innocency and necessity of public amusement in general, and of the stage in particular, the sober and virtuous people of this and every city would go in moderation to the theatres. This would at once take the ban off this diversion as a thing essentially and hopelessly wrong—an enormous injury to actors, and also to the public, whom it drives to their pleasures in defiance of what they themselves suppose to be right. Next, their presence there would be the only possible and effective censorship in a country like ours, securing the selection of plays of a harmless and spotless character, and their performance in a manner decorous and unblamable. Further, the same influence would exclude—for it has partially done it already—drinking places and improper characters, as such, from the play-house; and, finally, their countenance, requirement, and support, would give actors and actresses the strength and courage they so much need, to rise above the perils of their laborious and exciting vocation, and to take their place with other respected and respectable callings, upon the common platform of moral and Christian amenableness.

These suggestions are not speculations. They are based upon what is already begun, and now going on. The existence of a place like Niblo's Garden—and honorable mention should never fail to be made of that pioneer in theatrical reform in this community, William Niblo—which sober people of the less tightly-laced religious sects could attend without absolute loss of standing, has worked no small revolution in the external decency of theatrical manners and surroundings, in this city and country. That disgusting and odious gallery once allotted to vice—formerly deemed inseparable from the theatre—has been almost universally abandoned; while the bar has at least retired from public sight, and is, we trust, finally to retire from secret existence. It is encouraging to learn, that even now, the saloon for confectionery and ices is more profitable in some theatres, than the drinking-shop, and that where a good orchestra exists, comparatively few leave their seats between the acts for any other refreshment.

Is it not patent, too, that every theatre purifies itself to meet the precise taste for purity which it discovers in its patrons? As I learn from others—for I have very small personal experience—you might graduate the approaches to absolute spotlessness of words and motions—from a very remote, to a quite satisfactory, or at any rate, encouraging nearness to the standard of true morality, by observing the character and class of the audiences who support the various theatres of New York. I am assured by Christian gentlemen of Boston, that the principal theatre in that city is as free from a reproach of impurity or irreverence, as the ordinary circle of good society. And what but the partial relaxation of the code which has excluded moral worth and sobriety from the theatre, has effected this partial reform? Does not

progress lie only in this direction? And it is because of the abundant proof from all quarters that progress is making, that I have been encouraged and compelled to become a laborer in this field. But even now, it is impossible to read the accounts of the stage, the plots of the plays, without perceiving how urgently the theatre stands in need of a graver censorship—of the fear and of the support of a wiser, more thoughtful, and more solid portion of the people. I do not suppose, even now, that the theatre, in the character of its plays, is at all worse than much of the literature which finds its way, unreprieved, into our parlors and bed-rooms; and we may thank the indulgence of a sickly appetite for French novels, for the popularity of the prurient, morbid and undermining drama, of the French school, which, because it is decent in words, the innocent do not perceive to be indecent in conception; and debauching in its main drift. It needs a Christian intelligence, a sure, firm, moral instinct, to recognize and fitly characterize much of the insidious poison and fascinating corruption of the stage. But I truly believe that a dozen men of unquestioned purity, largeness and elevation of tone, could, at a single representation, make it impossible for such plays as the late alarmingly popular “Camille,” with others of its class, to be reheard. It is by no means certain that their authors are impure, or intend wrong. But they write on wrong and mischievous theories, and their works are performed on wrong and mischievous theories. Entire and unanimous reprobation must be fixed upon this whole school of plays; and the great genius which has helped to elevate them,—by her surpassing talent, must be kindly entreated and encouraged to seek a nobler fame in a better and more permanent field of acting.

Thousands are panoplied in innocency and escape the wrong from such plays; but the last restraints which held others on the brink of ruin, are loosened, and they follow the fascination into the pit of destruction. Ought not the clergy, the fathers, the professors, the learned, wise and responsible men of this community, to be lending their restraining and chastening presence, their supervision and judgment, to elevate and improve a place of resort, which their children, their pupils, their companions, their parishioners, will at any rate attend? I hesitate not to say, clearly they ought—even at the expense of being shocked, or disgusted!—clearly they ought, from duty alone. But take away superstition and fear of reproach, they would not require to go from duty alone. They would enjoy the relaxation which their presence purified—they would moderate by sharing a taste, which is made excessive by the exclusiveness in which it is indulged, and the inflammatory passions to which it appeals. Let great works, sterling comedy or solemn tragedy hold the stage, and the deeper emotions, satisfied to the full, would not covet this tickling of the sentimental nature, which makes one bad play only create a morbid appetite for another; and which carries so many to most harmful excess. On every account, then, the monitors and guides of the people should share their amusements, when not sinful in themselves. Their vices they may not share nor partake—their tastes and pleasures they may and ought. You need not tell me that the silent remonstrance, the settled reproof which the absence of the religious class from its scene gives to the levity and immorality of the theatre, are its most effectual and only Christian checks. I reply that these have proved utterly ineffectual, nay, have reacted upon the church and public morals—that

the theatre is none the better for this frown, and the church much the worse. It affects only the face that wears it. Besides, positive influence is a thousand times more powerful than negative. One good man, going to the theatre, does it more good than a hundred good men who stay away can do it. I believe it is Mrs. Mowatt who states in her *Recollections of the Stage*, that she has known the sudden discovery by the management, of the presence of a single person of eminent and virtuous character in the audience, chasten and qualify the whole performance; silencing ribaldry, repressing inuendo, and putting the whole company on their good behavior: and the managers of theatres in New York directly confirm the fact, as proved by their own experience. What might not the expected and certain presence of a small proportion of known and positive friends of purity, reverence and decency, in the theatre, do to change what is objectionable in the whole character of plays and players—the spirit and temper of the theatre?

I come now, finally, to the consideration of the influence of the theatre on the dramatic profession itself, which was, in my original intention, the main purpose of this address. You will excuse me, ladies and gentlemen of the theatre, for having so long talked over your heads to the religious community, but it has really been in your behalf and service; and I promise to confine myself wholly in what remains, to your more immediate case.

It is unquestionably true, that the exclusion of the theatre from the sympathies of a large and commanding portion of society, reprobating it as immoral and dangerous, has exerted a most unhappy and injurious influence upon the dramatic profession. Make any

calling disreputable—pronounce and maintain it to be, under ordinary circumstances, a disqualification for general society—hold it in constant and steady association with all the vices of the senses—and you have done all you can to degrade its tone, and to render it really dangerous and worthy of suspicion. If all surgeons were still compelled to be barbers, and were held in the repute of barbers, you can see what the probable state of that profession would be. Were the English clergy of the lower grades still everywhere put below the salt, and ranked among the upper servants of great houses, as Macaulay shows us they were even in the time of James II., they would continue the servile and sensual body they then were. Were butchers still made incapable of serving on juries, when life was at stake, because of the alleged cruelty of their trade and nature, they would probably justify their reputation for ferocity, were it only in scorn of the silly injustice of the law. While other professions or callings once and long regarded with suspicion, have risen above public odium, yours, members of the dramatic profession, has suffered the most obstinate and cruel reprobation. Almost every inducement, which society could offer, to lead discreet, orderly, and virtuous lives, has been taken away from players. Not only the religious, but the irreligious world, have held them to be a class of persons, who, to have adopted their calling, must be lost to self-respect, and to pursue it, must abandon all pretensions to virtue. Outcasts from the church, social pariahs, the very Jews and gypsies of Christian civilization—what could sustain any class at the average height of human worth, under disabilities so extraordinary and degrading? When transcendent genius and the rarest social gifts have enabled a few to climb

the barrier which has excluded their class from society, the very grounds of their reception have added nothing to the respectability of the general body, and offered no inducement to the moral efforts of the rest. Not worth, but beauty and genius have accomplished the victory, and these are neither moral nor voluntary. Indeed, the exceptional manner in which the dramatic profession has been treated; the capricious and arbitrary mode in which individuals who could bring brilliancy, beauty, or wit into general society, have been lifted over the fence, under pretended respect for their worth, but really of selfish desire for their company; the occasional intermarriage of an actress with a nobleman; the adoption and petting of favorites; all this generosity to a few at the expense of justice to all, has added to the injury and to the perils of the profession. What your profession needs and claims, is to be recognized as a legitimate and honest calling of Christian civilization; not inherently or essentially wrong; not on any separate or arbitrary footing; one, among the other respectable and responsible vocations, in which every member is to stand or fall on his individual merits; his character to be scanned and scrutinized as much as other men's and no more, and his worth and claims as a character distinguished from his worth and claims as an actor, precisely as it is in every profession beside. A good man is not always a good lawyer, nor a good lawyer a good man. A good man is not always a good actor, nor a good actor a good man.

I presume you would not deny that yours was a dangerous profession—dangerous, as I shall presently show, to the moral nature—and you, of course, do not expect, and have no right to expect, that any of the moral scars and stains, which this perilous trade has actually put

upon you, the world shall overlook. If you claim, as in proper self-respect you must claim, the ordinary protection of Christian society, the re-establishment of your social position on the same level with other crafts, you do at the same time recognize your amenableness to the moral obligations and judgments which they consent, or are compelled to be tried by. Unhappily as unjustly, your faults and follies, your vices and vanities, are not now judged with the same severity as those of other men and women, for the degrading reason that you are considered to have abandoned the moral ground of life, in the very adoption of your calling. If an actor or actress happens, from natural rectitude, purity, and force, or far better, from settled principle, to be a spotless character, it is spoken of in a tone of surprise, which is more insulting and injurious to the profession, than if it were not recognized at all. What I demand for you, in the name of Christian brotherhood, and of universal morality, is a complete restoration to the common rights and the common protection of society. Your calling is a lawful calling; lawful, in that it is the exercise of providential gifts and talents for the gratification and well being of society—itself a divine order—lawful, in that its highest and best fulfilment involves necessarily not the least infringement of one of God's laws, or Christ's precepts; lawful, in that it is recognized by the law of the land. Nor only so, it is an intellectual and artistic calling, demanding a somewhat rare organization—physical and mental—for its pursuit, and requiring, for high success, a degree of general information, culture and self-discipline, which should elevate it to the rank of the liberal professions. It is your duty, therefore, to claim, and our duty to concede to you, precisely the same kind of justice and charity, the same kind of

severity and censure, which the other honorable pursuits of life are visited with. You have a duty and a right to demand, that your private characters shall be held as sacred as that of other public persons; your virtues and discretion as readily admitted; your weaknesses as truly deplored, and your guilt as resolutely punished. The license of the world which would throw the scarf of its own self-indulgence over the ministers to its pleasure, in place of the mantle of Christian charity, can give you only a degrading cover. There is poison in the veil; it is Medea's gift to Creüsa. No! away with the forbearance of the world to actors and actresses! Away with its glosses for their vices! its hypocritical ignoring of their wickedness! its betraying tenderness towards the sins of its favorites! and welcome back the even-handed justice, the discriminating judgment, the fair, righteous verdict due to all, on the single merits of the character, tried in the uniform scales of Christian and social morality.

I have spoken of your life as a peculiarly perilous life—perilous to the moral nature; and before I explain particularly why it is so, let me say, that the post of moral danger may be the post of moral honor. It by no means follows that because a line of life is hazardous to virtue, it is a life forbidden to a moral being. There may be reasons for adopting it, which are imperative—such as a strong, constitutional proclivity, making any other course exceedingly difficult; an early education, fitting for nothing else; a powerful combination of providential circumstances, shutting up to that path; or a parental will which had shaped that course before responsibility began. If the theatre be a social necessity, the profession of the actor is a lawful one; and its moral perils, while they should make

it a calling slowly and reluctantly adopted by those who have a choice, are not such as to excuse any want of virtue, probity or the strictest decorum, in any of its professors. If they were such, the calling would be self-condemned. Perils and temptations are not of the nature of compulsive forces, and we are, none of us, having adopted a morally perilous vocation, to claim on that account any larger charity than other men of other callings. Only we are to put forth a greater and more constant effort to counteract these dangers. The life of a player is a morally perilous life, chiefly because it is a public life: and public life in every form is trying to the character. The actor shares with the politician, the clergyman, the dangers of a career, in which he is continually appealing to masses; where he is an object of interest to masses; where strong temptations exist to substitute immediate reputation for self-respect; and to make fine words and skilful manœuvres, do the work of sound principles and patient performance of duty. Public life, in all its forms, is surrounded with flatterers and fawners, and tempted to the bargain and exchange of its opportunities for the opportunities of others. All men who live by the tongue, whether it be in the utterance of their own thoughts or those of others; whose reputation and livelihood is in the ear of the public, are greatly exposed men; and it would be a long step in self-knowledge, if the members of the clerical profession recognized the fact, that the seriousness of their subject does less than they think, to save them from the dangers which essentially belong to the talking vocations. The error of mistaking the glow of composition for the flame of faith; or the pleasure of uttering generous sentiments, for the honor of holding them; or natural sympathy with eloquent passion, for

the courage and resolution of a good heart and life; this is a danger which rostrum, pulpit, and stage may equally share; and the consciousness of which, I confess, increases my sense of fraternity with your calling. And yet it remains solemnly true, that your profession is a dangerous profession, however lawful and necessary it may be, and sharing in some respects its perils with others. It is peculiarly open to vanity, levity and sensuality—more dangerous than it need be, on account of the present state of public opinion—but necessarily dangerous in any state of public sentiment. Aiming to please, and finding its chief incentive in the applause it nightly excites; peculiarly exposed to jealousy; required to affect sentiments and personate characters not its own; usually in contact only with its own class; feeling deeply the need of animal spirits and physical energies, most conveniently supplied by artificial stimulants; working chiefly in the night; vacillating between long seasons of leisure, and short periods of excessive labor; at the mercy of a capricious public, here very kind, and there very cruel; overpaid in its favorites, and underpaid in all who are not;—splendid for its *stars*, but dull for its *stocks*,—what elements are wanting to make your profession one of very singular moral trial? It must not, however, be forgotten that it has its own advantages. It is not addicted to cupidity, nor wedded to mean and sordid habits. It does not breed hardness of heart and hypocrisy of conduct. It is free from cant, and singularly exempt from the vices calling for the police or the prison. It should be better known than it is—that actors, as a class, are far from being men of the world, in the bad sense of that phrase; they are usually persons of more simplicity, credulity and generosity, than of knowing-

ness, design and self-seeking. Like sailors, more than any other people, their faults spring from the genial, childlike and affectionate side of their nature, and are rather faults of weakness than of wickedness. Who, but an unworldly actor, could allow his estate to be wasted by his trustees, as the English papers within a few days report Sir William Don's to have been ! In these days, when society is ridden with the night-mare of thrift, and ungodly greed of gain, forgiving any vices that are economical and conducive to the public wealth, it is not easy to estimate all the moral advantages which lovers of poetry and art, and servants of the drama, derive from their unproductive pursuits, and their essentially self-sacrificing callings. But with these allowances all made, it still becomes actors and actresses, to understand and consider the moral perils of their craft, and to recognize the deep need they have of all the safeguards which a cultivated conscience and a religious faith can throw about them. If any class should be scrupulous observers of the laws of temperance and purity, students of sober literature, keepers at home, watchful and observant of domestic ties, practisers of great plainness of costume in their private walks, quiet in manners, and careful seekers of friendship and intercourse with other classes than their own, it is yours. Emphatically, if any class should be church-goers, it is yours. I know you owe the visible church little thanks ; but the gospel and public worship, do not belong to its administrators ; and God and Christ have not wronged, and will not wrong you. Do not sacrifice your duty to your Maker, your Saviour, and your souls, to your indignation at priests and parsons.

I cannot conclude without a very serious word, addressed to managers of theatres, here and elsewhere.

You have a large class of persons connected with the dramatic profession, under your control and influence; besides your regular and permanent companies, the various members of choruses, ballets, spectacles, and underlings of every description. I understand that your powers are necessarily quite despotic. That you choose the plays that are performed, assign the parts, and have the prosperity of individual actors and *attachés* very much in your own hands. I can hardly conceive a position of more responsibility than yours, or one in which more of good and evil can be done. First, in regard to the character of the plays and entertainments you furnish, you will hardly rise at once above the public taste, or be wiser and better than the community that supports you. But you will certainly find it for your interest in the long-run, to exclude every kind of play or entertainment from your list, from which a virtuous heart must recoil, or at which an innocent cheek must blush. Be sure you gain nothing by the grossness or immorality of the plays you present. People will go to see great talent and great dramatic triumphs, in spite of the indecency or viciousness of the plots and incidents; but they would go a great deal more to see genius and power united with purity and truth. I take no narrow, squeamish view of the range of subjects proper for the stage, but plays which make light of moral distinctions, excuse vice, reward crime, or ridicule religion, are essentially mischievous, and cannot be defended anywhere. If managers wish to place themselves on the same catalogue with pimps, they have only to continue to quote the public taste as an apology for producing immoral and depraving plays. All honor is due to those among them who strive to produce the legitimate

drama, and I know and believe, that some managers feel a laudable and artistic loyalty to their profession, and make sacrifices to the exactions of taste, propriety, and purity, which the public do not sufficiently appreciate. I entreat you to consider what an enormous influence you possess for good or evil, and not to refuse to co-operate with a rising class of moral and serious persons, who are aiming to redeem and reform the stage.

But great as your responsibilities are to the public, I know not that they are not greater to the persons you employ. If you are tyrannical in temper, loose in morals, partial in administration, unprincipled in pecuniary transactions, I know no class of men that can be greater oppressors or greater depravers, than the managers of theatres. Your power is necessarily great; your opportunities boundless; your example irresistible. You have the living of young women at your mercy; the reputation of young actors in your gift. You can advance your favorites and clog your objects of dislike; reward the pliable, and punish the well-principled. You can establish rules of strictest decency and justice in your domain, or allow riot, folly, and vice to reign there. You can act as the aiders and abettors of the wickedness outside, making your theatres hotbeds of licentiousness and vice, or you may convert them to schools of artistic taste and moral culture. Since my interest in this subject has been known, I have been made the depository of complaints and supplications, which I will not repeat because I am unwilling to entertain them. Moreover I have reason to hope that a decided moral improvement in the internal management of theatres is now in progress, and one most honorable to those who encourage it. I certainly

make no specific charges against your important order, here or elsewhere. But knowing your peculiar opportunities and exposures—with the character of your whole profession in your keeping—I feel bound to warn you of the absolute necessity of rising above every temptation.

And so, gentlemen of the American Dramatic Fund Society, I conclude my long Address, wishing that I had had time to make it shorter, and less unworthy of the occasion. A heaven-supported determination to do an act of justice and public duty could alone have overcome my reluctance to encounter either favorable or unfavorable publicity. The mere rumor of this Address has already let loose the never too charitable tongue of the religious press in censure and disparagement, while my course has been intelligently approved by the secular papers. I trust neither will waste much time in personal blame or praise of me, but will rather devote themselves to an honest discussion of the fundamental principles involved in the subject. If it cannot be understood how a minister of Christ can feel an honest love for art, and pleasure, and the amusements of the people, much less a brotherly sympathy with actors as a class, I shall not wonder nor complain. The questioning of motives, and the imputation of worldliness and levity, are expected quite as a matter of course. But, firm in the love and confidence of a well-tried, intelligent, and sober constituency, I can surely afford to wait for justice.

In the rapid unfolding of the great Drama of American Civilization—its principal scene, this capital city—the part has fallen to me to show the relation of public amusements to public morality, and to claim for the stage a higher and better position in society.

In the very depths of my conscience, I have been impelled to this effort. It has been honestly made, in the fear of God and in view of judgment to come. That some blessing to your profession, the drama, our country, and mankind, may follow it, can only be my humble hope and prayer.